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AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT AND ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED NATIONS, 1945-95

1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, also marks 50 years of Australian membership. Throughout the history of the organisation, Australia's involvement has been underpinned by a bipartisan commitment to multilateralism and the ideals that the United Nations represents. This commitment derives from Australia's international status as a medium-sized power and the recognition that international regimes provide Australia with a higher degree of protection and influence than it could otherwise hope to achieve. Support for the purposes and principles of the UN Charter is consequently a central element of Australia's foreign policy. Of these, high priority is attached to support for the UN's role in improving international security, in encouraging respect for human rights and in promoting international cooperation for economic and social development. Australia is also very conscious that global problems such as environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS and drug trafficking can be effectively addressed only at the international level.

Australia was a founding member of the UN and played an active role in the drafting of the UN Charter at the San Francisco Conference of 1945. The Australian delegation, led by External Affairs Minister, Dr Herbert Evatt, championed the rights of middle and smaller powers vis-a-vis the permanent members of the Security Council. Through Dr Evatt's efforts, Australia was successful in broadening the role of the General Assembly relative to the Security Council and in arguing that the UN's sphere of action should encompass an economic and social, as well as a security, agenda. Dr Evatt also sought to have limits placed upon the veto power of the permanent members, but the great powers conceded little ground on this point.

In the ensuing years, Australia has continued to make a constructive contribution to the United Nations. Australia has served four terms on the Security Council, in 1946-47, 1956-57, 1973-74 and 1985-86. During the first of these terms Australia provided the Council's first President, Norman Makin. In 1948, Dr Evatt was elected President of the General Assembly and presided over the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Australia cooperated closely with the UN in the decolonisation process, one of the UN's great success stories, and was one of the architects of the international trusteeship systems (Chapter XII of the Charter). In 1975, a long period of Australian membership of the trusteeship council came to an end with the independence of Papua New Guinea. Australia was also a longstanding member of the Special Committee on Decolonisation, withdrawing in January 1985 following UN recognition of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands' decision to integrate with Australia.

Throughout its 50 year history, Australia has been one of the leading voices in the UN on human rights issues, not only in defence of fundamental human rights accepted by the international community as universal, but also in expanding the body of human rights treaties in specific areas and in improving the effectiveness of the UN's monitoring machinery on human rights. In support of these aims, Australia continues to play an active role in the UN Commission on Human Rights and is a strong supporter of the work of the expert UN bodies dealing with the implementation of

international human rights conventions. Justice Elizabeth Evatt is currently a member of the Human Rights Committee and Professor Philip Alston chairs the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Justice Michael Kirby was recently named UN Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia.

International security is also an issue on which Australia has been very active, most notably through the UN Conference on Disarmament. Australia made a major contribution to the successful negotiation of a Chemical Weapons Convention and has taken a leading role in attempts to secure a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty for nuclear weapons. Achieving the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty will continue to be a major foreign policy goal for Australia.

As evidenced by its long history of contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, Australia strongly supports the UN's role in this area and has welcomed the rapid expansion of the UN's peacekeeping responsibilities following the end of the Cold War. In February 1994, Australia was providing personnel for the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, the UN Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East, the UN operation in Somalia and the Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. Australia played a pivotal role in the resolution of the conflict in Cambodia, one of the UN's major recent success stories. The concept of a UN-led interim authority to prepare the country for democratic elections was an Australian initiative, and Australia made important contributions of personnel and equipment to the resultant UN transitional administration. Senator Evans' book *Cooperating for Peace*, launched at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly in 1993, has been Australia's main contribution to the debate on enhancing international security stimulated by the Secretary-General's publication of *An Agenda for Peace*.

Australia contributes financially to the United Nations through timely payment of its assessed share of the regular budget, currently 1.51 per cent of the total, and through payments to the budgets of the various UN agencies. In 1992-93, Australia contributed \$22.8 million to the UN's core budget and \$40.9 million for peacekeeping. Australia's peacekeeping contribution is expected to rise to around \$70 million in 1993-94. Australia also makes substantial voluntary contributions to UN development activities, humanitarian appeals and for specific human rights purposes.

Australia has been an active participant in the work of the UN Economic and Social Council since its inception, and Australia's Ambassador to the UN, Richard Butler, is currently President of the Council. In 1994, Australia was a member of six of the Council's subsidiary bodies: the Statistical Commission; the Commission on Human Rights; the Commission on the Status of Women; the Commission on Narcotic Drugs; the Commission on Sustainable Development; and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Australia also plays a prominent role in the UN's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which is based in Bangkok.

Australia is a member of 16 UN Specialised Agencies and in 1994 was serving on the governing bodies of six of these: the International Civil Aviation Organisation; the International Labour Organisation; the International Telecommunication Union; the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; the Universal Postal Union; and the World Meteorological Organisation.

Australia is also currently serving on the governing bodies of a number of other UN organisations and programs, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN's Children's Fund, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the World Food Program and the UN Environment Program.

Australia accepts the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and plays an active role in bodies concerned with the development of international law. In 1993, Sir Ninian Stephen was elected as a judge on the International Tribunal for Crimes in the former

Yugoslavia, while Professor James Crawford is a member of the UN International Law Commission.

The fiftieth anniversary of the UN has intensified interest world-wide in reforming the UN's structures and operations to enable it to meet the challenges of the post-cold war world. Australia stands strongly committed to reform in a wide range of areas, including improving humanitarian relief coordination, the composition and functioning of the Security Council, restructuring of the Secretariat and management of peace operations, and will continue to seek opportunities to make a constructive contribution to the reform process.

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